



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 15, 2017



Introduction to the Word:

Here we have another of Jesus' banquet stories –*with a twist*- which leaves us scratching our heads. Jesus uses this literary tool to make us dig deep and examine His words, in order to arrive at an explosive meaning. The first picture that comes to mind is the number of times the banquet image appears. Eventually, of course, there will be the Great Banquet at the end of time but before that there are smaller ones in between. For us as Catholic Christians, *THE* banquet is the Eucharist, and the stories Jesus tells point to IT, in one way or another. The parable today is about the garment/gift of faith that we received at Baptism, which gives us the privilege or right to participate in the banquet of the Eucharist. The question this Lord's Day, we as we seek to remember that [“We Are Better Together”](#), that God's Word is asking us is “how do we respond to the invitation to be participate in the banquet?” Let us move forward on a common pathway with the principles of the past few weeks in mind with one single chant which we must be about as a parish family: **offering every person in our community a life changing encounter with Jesus.**

Warm Up Activity:

As you prepare to enter into your group discussion, pause first of all to reflect on the following – maybe even consider writing some of these things down in a journal or on a sheet a paper – these you might share with your group – or you could keep them just for your own reflection:

- a) Share your experience of the main difference between enjoyable banquets and ones which you wanted to gracefully exit as soon as possible.
 - b) When someone significant to you chooses to be absent from a celebration, does this detract from the joy of the celebration?
- What stands out to you about the last few weeks of our message series?
 - What principle do you take with you as we enter this week and continue to move forward?
- Ok - **“What do you think?”**

Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:

God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,



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*and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

FIRST READING (Isaiah 25:6-10a)

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20)

Brothers and sisters: I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. My God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Matthew 22:1–14)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Once more Jesus spoke to the chief priests and Pharisees in parables: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.

“Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

“Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those



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slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

COMMENTARY:

Consider hearing again the Sunday Message

Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a large banquet. This is an image Jesus used over and over again. When we talk about spiritual growth, it is about enjoying the feast and celebration God has in store for us. Spiritual growth allows us to enjoy the abundant gifts and blessings of God’s kingdom. When the focus of our lives – and the focus of our parish – is on spiritual growth – then we truly are better together!

As in our culture today, wedding feasts were very important in that time, but even more so. People would make it a priority to go to a wedding for the feasting and celebration, but surprisingly in the parable no one participates. They refuse to enjoy the good things the king has prepared and miss out on the celebration, relationships and lost opportunities. In many ways it is the manifestation of the “cycle of ingratitude – remember:” *When the “cycle of gratitude” does not take place then most often the “cycle of ingratitude” begins.*

As we discerned last week, the “cycle of ingratitude” is best described as “hard feelings” which, then depending on the maturity of those involved, can either resemble a Junior Kindergarten classroom, or a mature series of adult discussions. Every family, relationship and organization becomes subject to this. Sometimes when the “cycle of ingratitude” goes too far, we see violence, selfishness and even people feeling rejected or “leaving” because they are angry.

This is why Service Saturday, Tuesday Night Together, outreach efforts by our Small Groups – all of these are important because they keep the “cycle of gratitude” going. This is why a simple hand written “Thank you Note” is so powerful. This is why the Eucharist and weekly being at Sunday Mass is so vital. It keeps the “cycle of gratitude” in motion.

But we know that sometimes, like in the Gospel – people reject the invitation to the banquet – Sunday Mass. Funny enough all the reasons are the same today as they were in the parable, (c.f. – *“But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them”*). In other words “I don’t need religion, I am busy, don’t talk to me about God...” The king responds in an interesting way.... He invites



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more to come... others... he opens the door ever the wider..... He does not allow “the cycle of in gratitude” to begin in his heart... but is ever the more grateful for all who come.

So I guess here is the question for us as Disciples of Jesus – and for us as a parish community committed to **offering every person in our community a life changing encounter with Jesus. Are we inviting others?**

A little self-examination might help here:

- When was the last time we invited or brought a friend to Mass?
- When we don't see someone at our parish that use to belong – do we ever ask them to return (even if they give the same excuses as above)?
- When was the last time we spoke positively about our parish, priests, our religion – even if people don't share the “cycle of gratitude” that we do?
- When was the last time we generously donated to our parish to keep things not only ‘operating’ but ensuring we can invite others to the banquet

So often we are hesitant to ask the above and maybe even say “this is not my role, it is not my business.” This Gospel tells us it surely is! If we are not contributing to the cycle of gratitude then we are leaving room for the cycle of in gratitude to begin. If we say well “when they have time they will come”, or “they have a lot going on now, soon they will come” then we are much like the excuse makers in the parable who had ingratitude in their hearts.

Let me pause with this little story. At a parish I served at once there was a couple. They were at church every day and seemed pious. But in their hearts there was a hardness that made them offer snide remarks about others and priests even during Mass. They came to the banquet but not with gratitude. Here is what I learned from observing them – they might have been pious but they did not possess gratitude. In the Gospel, the King discovered that those he had invited were not grateful - but he kept inviting others to the banquet (even when rejected) because the banquet was important and his heart possessed gratitude. Since he never gave up, in time, his banquet hall was filled with people who might not have been pious, but they were grateful. Do we keep inviting? Do we possess gratitude for the invitation to come to the banquet?

As we draw soon to a conclusion our series (only one more week to go), are we keeping our commitment to the Banquet? Are we aware of what keeps us from it? Are we present with piety or pure gratefulness? Are we seeking in all we do (action and especially word) to lead others to know that by **offering every person in our community a life changing encounter with Jesus – we are better together!**

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: *(15-20 minutes)*



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- What commitments do you find the easiest to keep? What has made it easier for you to keep them?
- When have you found yourself making a commitment with a good intention, but then not keeping it?
- What are some activities that you would love to get off of your schedule because they do not produce any fruit in your life?
- What obstacles or tests have you encountered in your life that have kept you from your spiritual commitments? What do you consider some of the factors that contribute to people “not coming out” to services provided by the parish community, especially Sunday’s Eucharist?
- In your life, what fruit have you seen from staying committed to a spiritual practice?

Intercessions:

**“One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek;
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.....”**

(Psalm 27:4)

Leader: Our response: Lord Hear us

- For the Church throughout the world, may we deepen our love and reverence for the gift of Jesus really and truly present in the Holy Eucharist. We pray to the Lord.

- That all Christians may we give witness to Christ by reaching out in kindness with our neighbour and share the gift of faith that has been placed in our hearts. We pray to the Lord.

- For our parish community, may we continue to strive to be place of acceptance, welcome and a home where we feel connected to the Love of God, and each other, with the Eucharist as the centre of our lives. We pray to the Lord.

- That all married couples may they deepen their commitment to Christ and to one another, and for families, may they continue to be examples of God’s mercy and love. We pray to the Lord.

- For those who have died, and for those grieving the loss of a loved one, and for those we have promised to pray for, especially the sick, and those intentions in our Parish Book of Prayer. We pray to the Lord.

**Leader: Let us seek the intercession of the Patroness of our Parish as we pray:
Hail Mary**

Closing Activity and Prayer (15-20 minutes)



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(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and “outreach” to the larger community.)

GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:

GROUP PRAYER COMMITMENT

- Consider together as a group a social outreach which connects to our parish – our Haiti Mission, doing a Service Saturday activity together, making quilts, helping the Outreach program at St Patrick Parish in Hamilton.
- How can we help each other pray this week? Take a sheet of paper and write one personal intention or struggle you are facing that needs prayer. Make sure not to put your name on it. Fold the sheet of paper and place in the centre of the group. Mixed up the pile, and each person take a sheet. Pray that intention for a member of your group this week.
- Consider making a Holy Hour for the intentions of our parish community this week.

Looking for More: Have you heard about [Starting Point?](#) Check out details and consider helping someone who has wandered away from faith or our parish to come back home.

Let us pray (together)

May this gracious invitation to share the wedding feast of your Son on the last day be a constant reminder that all is grace—everything is gift— and keep us from ever turning away any who come to your table. Rather let us work to fulfill the vision of your prophet, and the mission of your Son: a welcome table open to all. We ask this through Jesus your Son, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, One God for ever. Amen

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